

**THE IMPACT OF A MULTI-STRATEGY ACADEMIC WRITING HANDBOOK ON
EMERGENT BILINGUALS' CROSS-CURRICULAR WRITING COMPETENCES**

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THE IMPACT OF AN AWRH ON ELT STUDENTS' WRITING

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TRABAJO DE GRADO COMO REQUISITO PARA OPTAR AL TÍTULO DE
LICENCIADO EN BILINGÜISMO CON ÉNFASIS EN INGLÉS

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--David Andrés Lasso García

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--Yesenia Osorio Castaño

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Resumen

La escritura académica en una segunda lengua puede ser uno de los requerimientos más complejos en la educación superior debido a los elementos lingüísticos, estratégicos y procedimentales que esta abarca al igual que los procesos cognitivos superiores que involucra. A pesar de su presencia permanente en la academia, los profesores no han encontrado aún una forma apropiada para enseñar y evaluar la escritura que garantice el progreso de los estudiantes y el apoyo continuo a lo largo de su proceso de aprendizaje. De esta manera, este estudio de caso de métodos mixtos apunta a diseñar y evaluar la efectividad de un Manual de Referencia para la Escritura Académica (MREA) que pretende proveer la asistencia constante que los estudiantes necesitan para solidificar su conocimiento de escritura y el material pedagógico apropiado que los docentes requieren para unificar los prácticas de enseñanza y evaluación de la escritura; este manual está fundamentado en los enfoques de la escrita como proceso y basada en el género, análisis de errores y evaluación formativa.

La información recolectada de escritos, cuestionarios y entrevistas ejecutados a 16 estudiantes de octavo semestre de un programa de preparación de profesores de inglés de una universidad pública colombiana. Los hallazgos de la investigación demuestran que el MREA es una herramienta exitosa para ofrecer a los estudiantes la guianza que ellos requieren, además de mejorar sus habilidades de composición escrita. De hecho, los resultados muestran que su escritura mejoró en términos de discurso, organización y sintaxis. Sin embargo, factores externos como el conocimiento previo de escritura de los estudiantes y su etapa de desarrollo lingüístico también afectan su nivel de interacción con el material. Por último, la mediación del profesor entre el contenido del material y los estudiantes, un mayor énfasis en los procesos metacognitivos involucrados en la escritura y un uso temprano de este tipo de recursos debería ser considerado para estudios de naturaleza similar.

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Palabras clave: escritura académica, enfoque de la escritura como proceso, enfoque basado en género, análisis de errores, educación superior, conocimiento composicional.

Abstract

Writing academically in a second language might be one of the most difficult requirements in tertiary education due to the linguistic, strategic, and procedural elements it encompasses as well as the higher cognitive processes it involves. Despite its permanent presence in the academia, professors have not found a suitable way to teach and assess writing that guarantees students' progress and continuous support throughout their learning process. Thus, this mixed-method case study aims at designing and evaluating the effectiveness of an Academic Writing Reference Handbook (AWRH) that intends to provide the constant assistance students need to solidify their writing knowledge, and the proper pedagogical material professors demand to unify their writing instruction and assessment practices. This handbook is grounded on the Writing Process and Genre-based Approaches, error analysis and formative assessment.

The data was collected from written samples, questionnaires and interviews given to 16 eighth semester students from an English Teacher Preparation Program of a Colombian state university. The findings demonstrate that the AWRH is a successful tool for offering learners the guidance they require and helps them better their compositional skills. Indeed, results show that their writing improved in terms of discourse, organization, and syntax. However, external aspects such as students' writing background knowledge and their second language development also affect their level of interaction with the material. Lastly, professors' mediation between materials' content and students, a major emphasis on the metacognitive processes involved in writing, and early employment of these kinds of sources should be considered for studies of similar nature.

Key words: academic writing, writing process approach, genre-based approach, error analysis, higher education, writing knowledge.

Presentation

The last centuries have brought several changes to higher education that require students to refine their abilities in order to meet the permanently evolving requirements. These new requisites not only call upon learners to be able to successfully perform in their immediate academic circumstances, but also to fulfill some of the main international standards. Thus, writing academically in a globalized language like English has become a priority for the academia. However, due to the complexity already embedded in the process of writing, learning to write academically in a second language turns into a challenge for both students and professors. Indeed, this is caused by the lack of assertive teaching and assessment models and supporting pedagogical materials (Marulanda & Martínez, 2017).

Bearing this in mind, this research project, far from imposing an absolute model for writing instruction and assessment, intended to design, implement and evaluate the impact of a multi-strategy Academic Writing Reference Handbook on eighth semester students from an English Teacher Preparation Program at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.

This multi-strategy Academic Writing Reference Handbook is grounded on six core concepts: (1) academic writing which is considered as a complex skill devoted to produce written compositions for the academy (Irvin, 2010); (2) the writing process approach which looks at writing as an iterative process that is composed of well-defined stages that allows learners to learn from their own writing process (White and Arndt, 1997; Coffin, 2003); (3) the genre-based approach which is recognized as a helpful model to raise learners' awareness on organizational and linguistic features of the different genres (Henry & Roseberry, 1998); (4) error analysis which is regarded as a means to classify the most frequent linguistic errors and their causes to contribute to the understanding of the second language learning process (Burt, 1975); (5) formative assessment which is put as "an active and intentional learning process that partners the teacher and students to continuously and systematically gather

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evidence of learning with the express goal of improving student achievement” (Brookhart, 2013, p.102); (6) transferability which is defined as “the process of using knowledge or skills acquired in one context in a new or varied context” (Justice, Rice, and Warry, 2009, p. 2).

Written samples, interviews, and questionnaires were used as data collection methods to gather quantitative and qualitative information to measure the impact of the Academic Writing Reference Handbook. The analysis procedures followed the open, axial and selective coding steps from the Grounded Theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) who claimed that this methodology seeks to create theory that contributes to the field based on diverse types of data.

In general terms, results shed light onto the advantages of using pedagogical materials such as the Academic Writing Reference Handbook for improving students' compositional skills. Moreover, it could be determined that the effectiveness of these sources depends not only on its organization and content, but also on learners' level of interaction and professors' mediation. Lastly, this project provided insights on additional aspects that should be taken into account for further research like the metacognitive processes involved in writing, the pertinence of early implementation of supporting sources, and the careful investigation of transferability.

1. Statement of the Problem

Writing academically in a foreign language involves grammatical and lexical expertise, and it definitely implies having a set of skills to create texts that are both accurate and substantial. In tertiary education contexts, students are compelled to use higher-order thinking skills in their compositions since expectations are more demanding and seek to meet the international quality standards of the 21st century. Irvin (2010) considers academic writing as “a form of evaluation that asks you to demonstrate knowledge and show proficiency with certain disciplinary skills of thinking, interpreting, and presenting” (p. 8). Consequently, second language teachers should know how to incorporate, teach, and assess academic writing to students as early in their educational process as possible, so they reach tertiary education with well-developed compositional skills.

However, according to Yang (2016) professors do not obtain the expected results when teaching students to write, not even from the most studious learners. Moreover, he states that the lack of writing ability among university students is mainly caused by deficient teacher instruction, negative first language transfer, and scarce teaching materials and methods. To exemplify such a literacy gap, a study on students' performance done by the Colombian Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation stated that there is a limited number of scientific publications in international journals due to the struggle undergraduate students have when writing academically (COLCIENCIAS, 2016). As a matter of fact, this deficiency in academic writing skills is also reflected on the Bilingual Teaching Program from Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira whose population usually has difficulties with writing due to the aforementioned causes and weak first language (L1) foundations from elementary and high school that affect their performance in a foreign language (L2) (Marulanda & Matínez, 2017).

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Despite the vast literature acknowledging academic writing issues, researchers have not directed their attention to find proper ways to overcome them, especially in higher education contexts. Additionally, there is a necessity to conduct further research on the positive effects of looking at writing as a process that requires ongoing feedback in order to produce better texts (Hunter, 1993). In this respect, this case study aims at designing an Academic Writing Reference Handbook (AWRH) to ensure the continuous support students need to solidify the writing process steps and the particular features related to the different genres required in their courses. The handbook's effectiveness was evaluated through analysis of students' writing tasks with lists of errors, interviews, and questionnaires given to the students of the Classroom Language Assessment course in eighth semester in the English Teacher Preparation Program.

Research Questions

The present case study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does the implementation of an Academic Writing Reference Handbook impact the transferability of academic writing skills in an undergraduate course of an English Teacher Preparation Program?
2. How does the use of an Academic Writing Reference Handbook influence the way students compose academic texts?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Academic Writing. According to Tarigan (1994) the purpose of writing is to produce symbols that represent a language and these symbols can only be read and understood by members of the same linguistic community. Due to the growing necessity of writing in tertiary education, a subcategory of writing called Academic Writing emerged. Irvin (2010) considers academic writing as all the writing tasks devoted to fulfill academic purposes. As writing is a complex skill, it is bound to higher order cognitive processes, especially when writing in academic contexts. Heinemann (2006), for instance, notes that academic writing shows a high level of complexity due to the formal language that it entails which is not present in ordinary writing.

2.1.1.1 Academic Writing in EFL and ELT. Learning to write academically is difficult for English native students, but it is even more challenging for EFL learners (Zhu, 2004) as they need to learn the English language in all of its dimensions. Sajid (2016) remarks that English native speaker students find writing easier than second language learners as they already have internalized the grammatical basis from an early age. In this respect, EFL learners need to gain proficiency in the correct use of discourse, syntax, vocabulary and conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation) in order to accomplish an academic writing task appropriately. The absence of this writing features also affect their fluency and accuracy when composing texts. Thus, the lack of a vast lexicon may increase the time spent in writing while the intended message may be imprecise, causing frustration among both instructors and students (Gugin, 2014).

Even though academic writing is of paramount importance in English Language Teaching (ELT) programs, professors still struggle to provide students with useful strategies that can facilitate the writing process while acquiring the language (Yang, 2016). In order to

overcome these teaching and learning difficulties, teachers have tried several methods such as the Writing Process Approach (WPA) and the Genre-based Approach. It has been shown that ELT academic writing instruction has been more effective after implementing those two methodologies (Marulanda & Martínez, 2017). The former and the latter methods help pre and in-service teachers plan and structure more efficiently their writing lessons.

2.1.2 Writing Process Approach. The Writing Process Approach (WPA) is a student-centered approach which conceives writing as an iterative process where planning, drafting, revising, and receiving feedback take place. Consequently, teachers and students are provided with a scheme where writing is not linear but circular. WPA facilitates the process of writing for teachers and students due to the fact that the constant teacher-student interaction involved in the feedback sessions enables instructors to maximize students' potential in compositional skills. In fact, through the scaffolding guidance of this process, any student can improve writing regardless of his aptitude.

White and Arndt (1997) explain how the WPA' stages work: (1) prewriting includes brainstorming which helps students use their background knowledge about the topic at hand; (2) when planning, focusing on and structuring the outline make students raise awareness of the type of task; (3) drafting leads students to transform their thoughts into written words; (4) reflecting upon the initial drafts allows writers to notice visible mistakes and modify some aspects that may be unclear; (5) feedback, from instructors or classmates, helps teachers and students reformulate the written compositions in terms of organization and content; (6) revising their own texts allows students to decide whether their work fulfill all the requirements.

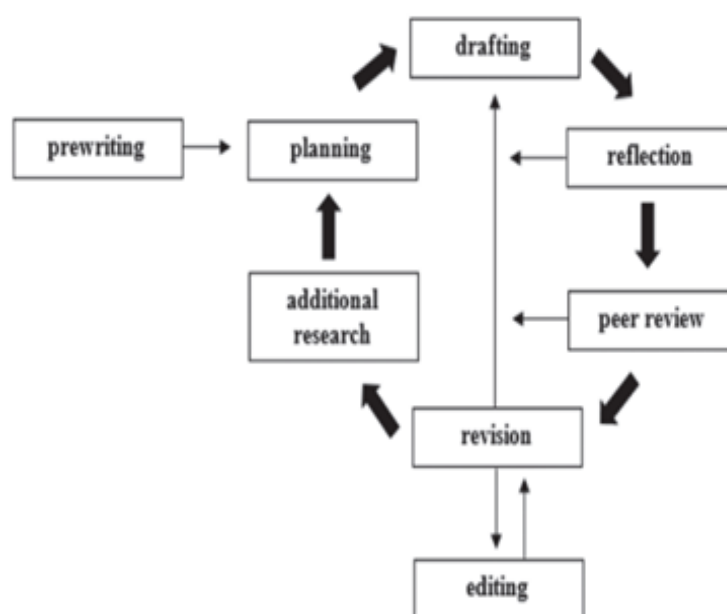


Figure 1. Writing Process Approach - Taken from Marulanda & Martínez (2017) and adapted from Coffin (2003).

2.1.3 Genre-based Approach for Writing. In writing, genre refers to the particular purpose of the text and its series of characteristics that help the writer communicate the message. There are many text genres, and the most commonly found in formal education are the descriptive, reflective, argumentative, and expository. In this context, “the aim of genre-based approach is to raise learners' awareness of both the rhetorical organization and the linguistic features closely associated with the genre” (Henry & Roseberry, 1998, p.147). Given the fact that one of the focuses of this teaching method looks at establishing the specific tone and register of each genre, it contributes to academic writing as it determines the specialized vocabulary and discourse style students can use.

According to Hyon (1996), the genre-based approach is highly used by ELT teachers due to the advantages it brings for L2 learners. For instance, Henry and Roseberry (1998) highlight the fact that genre-based instruction improves students’ text quality and conveys meaning more assertively. Hyon (1996) further suggests that implementing this teaching

method will help students succeed in writing as they will be able to meet international writing standards. Additionally, she states that writing based on text genres empowers students to undertake the academic writing demands of current educational issues.

2.1.4 Formative Assessment. Formative assessment represents one of the most significant components in writing instruction not only because it provides a score for students' products, but more importantly because it sheds light on the areas that need improvement. As Brookhart (2013) puts it, "is an active and intentional learning process that partners the teacher and students to continuously and systematically gather evidence of learning with the express goal of improving student achievement" (p.102). This assessment method aims at supporting the learning process by providing students with different input to boost their skills, in this case, writing. Indeed, if there is no further learning, the assessment was not formative. Within the formative assessment practices, it is essential to set learning goals, provide thorough feedback, and use specialized rubrics.

2.1.4.1 Formative Assessment for Writing. Even though the use of formative assessment in writing is under-researched, there are a few studies that have illustrated the multiple benefits that this type of assessment has in the development of EFL writers' skills (Lee, 2011; Lee & Coniam, 2013). Sandvik's (2012) study explains that most of the instructional time in compositional classes is spent on completing written products, but little is invested on showing students how to approach writing. Also, students do not receive enough supervision from professors throughout the writing process, and this interaction is even lower during the assessment part when instructors use traditional summative assessment practices (Sadler, 2009). Nevertheless, when formative assessment is applied, students are encouraged to participate actively in their own learning and assessment processes, which results in learners feeling more motivated towards writing.

Burner's (2015) findings show that students appreciate being involved in formative assessment and become more aware of their learning and writing outcomes as they need to do self-assessment activities. Additionally, Naghdipour (2016) states that the formative feedback provided by teachers or partners leads students to more authentic and meaningful assessment activities that foster independent learning. As students' interest in writing increases, the confidence in their writing abilities improves as well. Naghdipour (2016) further asserts that formative assessment helps students to systematically overcome their errors and problems in different areas of writing as they polish their drafts; therefore, it is especially successful in reducing their grammatical and lexical errors.

2.1.5 Error Analysis in EFL. Error analysis in EFL emerged from teachers' desire to see students speak and write flawless English. However, given the fact that students are faced with the need to use English before they have mastered it, errors and mistakes will inevitably occur in their speech and writing. In linguistics, errors and mistakes are clearly distinguished; while errors emerge from the student's lack of grammatical knowledge, mistakes are simply failures to use already known rules of the language (Brown, 1994). One of the main focuses of error analysis is to categorize the most frequent linguistic errors and their causes in order to contribute to the description of the second language learning process (Burt, 1975). Hence, error analysis is a valuable guide for teachers to determine the sequence and emphasis of instruction in EFL classrooms. Students expect their teachers to help them improve their writing skills.

Londoño's (2008) defined an error "as a deviation from the norms of the target language", and several studies (Burt, 1975; Thewissen, 2013) have looked for the most recurrent errors among EFL students, and presented the following findings:

- ❖ Formal errors: spelling or morphological errors that result in non-existent English words.
- ❖ Grammatical errors: errors that break the general rules of English grammar.
- ❖ Lexical errors: errors involving the lexico-semantic properties of words or phrases (conceptual, collocational, connotative).
- ❖ Lexico-grammatical errors: errors that violate the lexico-grammatical properties of words (erroneous dependent prepositions, erroneous complementation patterns, or countable/uncountable noun confusion).
- ❖ Punctuation errors: errors that involve punctuation problems (confusion between punctuation markers, missing or redundant markers).
- ❖ Word redundant/missing/order errors: unnecessary use of words, missing necessary words, or misordered words.
- ❖ Style errors: sentence fragments and incomprehensible sentences.

The process of analyzing students' errors must be carried out carefully. "Limiting the number of corrections to those that affect communication allows the student to build up enough confidence to want to continue learning the language" (Burt, 1975, p.62).

Nonetheless, Myler (2002) claims that if students do not know their errors and the ways to overcome them, then future instruction will not have the desired results.

2.1.6 Transferability. In view of the fact that transferability of writing skills will be analyzed in this study, it is necessary to state some of its most common conceptions, and especially, the perception embraced by the researchers of this investigation. In broad terms, Justice, Rice, and Warry (2009) conceived "transfer as the process of using knowledge or skills acquired in one context in a new or varied context" (p. 2). Thus, transferability cannot take place if individuals have not been previously exposed to knowledge of a certain field that is expected to be applied in other scenarios. Amiryousefi (2017) stated that there is a

belief among academics that transferability can only occur within a context parallel to the one where knowledge and skills were acquired. However, as stated by Alexander and Murphy cited in Justice, Rice, and Warry (2009) “rather than simply generalizing across problem contexts, transfer implies domains and tasks that are similar but not the same” (p. 2).

Depending on the situation, the learning transferred can be conceptual, procedural, strategic, or tacit knowledge (Doyle, 2004).

In the context of language acquisition, transferability has been interpreted negatively and positively. For example, authors such as Koda (1988) present definitions of transferability that are related to the interference factors from the L1 system that hinder the acquisition of the L2. On the other hand, “when learning in one context improves learning or performance in another context it is positive transfer” (Doyle, 2004, p. 8); and in this case, we are only concerned about measuring the latter type. Also, based on the research questions, the transferability that can occur from the L1 to the L2 will not be taken into account. Instead, we focus on the transfer of conceptual, procedural, strategic, and tacit knowledge learned in the L2 to similar situations.

2.1.6.1 Transferability in Writing. Transferability in writing is not only a dynamic and complex phenomenon, but also a process that requires knowledge and practice. Knowledge and practice make reference to conceptual and procedural knowledge respectively. In the context of this study, the former comprises understanding aspects of vocabulary, conventions, syntax, discourse, and organization, and the latter entails knowing how to use the writing process approach. Blake, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) argue that in order for transferability to successful occur in the field of academic writing, two conditions have to be met: (1) higher educational institutions must be aware that transferability is possible and that it can be achieved by offering sustained support to students; (2) curriculum designers must make content and pedagogical adaptations by including similar writing tasks

throughout the different subjects of their programs. Stated briefly, transferability in writing is a matter of fostering the use of previously acquired knowledge and skills in varied contexts with continuous guidance.

2.2 Literature Review

Written compositions at the university level require a good command of discourse, syntax, vocabulary, mechanics and language conventions. As a matter of fact, the majority of undergraduate students are expected to be able to produce academic texts from a variety of genres. Nonetheless, it has been demonstrated that many EFL students' text compositions are error-strewn: syntax, punctuation, and sentence construction issues are some of the most frequent deficiencies students show in their papers (Sajid & Siddiqui, 2015). This poor performance is partly due to several issues such as: (1) the few opportunities public schools give to students to write in their first language (L1), so their second language (L2) writing skills are affected too (Marulanda and Martínez, 2017); (2) unsatisfactory teacher instruction and scarce teaching materials and methods; (3) length rather than the content and language use is the main concern of novice writers (Sajid & Siddiqui, 2015). As a consequence, teachers are in dire need of having a guide which can help them approach and evaluate writing appropriately, and make students polish their writing skills.

2.2.1 The Writing Process Approach. The Writing Process Approach (WPA) attempts to raise students' awareness on recognizing writing as a dynamic and cyclical process with several stages. Apart from its other advantages, it allows students to have a clearer view of their mistakes, and therefore, correct them. Grounded on the positive outcomes obtained through the implementation of the Writing Process Approach for the composition of written products in undergraduate scenarios (Costas, 2002; Akinwamide, 2012; Marulanda & Martínez, 2017), both learners and professors could benefit from

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integrating this approach as a strategy that supports students in the process of strengthening their academic writing skills.

One of the most recent studies about the effectiveness of implementing a multi-strategy approach to improve pre-service teachers' composition skills using the WPA was conducted by Marulanda and Martinez (2017). This research arose from the necessity to overcome an increasing deterioration in students' performance when writing academically. The participants were 16 learners from an English Teacher Preparation Program who were enrolled in a new academic writing class, and whose ages ranged between 18 and 25 years old. For implementing this multi-strategy research, the authors included systematized feedback provided by teachers and peers, ongoing tutoring in a writing lab, and standardized test-taking practices (TOEFL) as the basic elements to design the course curriculum which, at the same time, was based on the different stages that compose the WPA. According to Coffin (2003), as cited by Marulanda and Martínez (2017), the WPA embraces seven main components: planning, drafting, reflection, peer review, revision, editing, and additional research.

In order to collect data, the researchers used task-specific qualitative rubrics that measured the participants' progress in terms of discourse, organization, syntax, vocabulary, and conventions. The written products analyzed were taken from the first and second semester of 2016; the selected samples were descriptive and summary paragraphs, descriptive essays, and TOEFL integrated writing tasks. Once the grades from each semester were averaged, it was possible to notice the difference between the writing features of quality and task performance from one semester to the other. For instance, regarding writing features, in cohort 1 77,5% of the students obtained grades between 3.5 and 4.7 while in cohort 2 85% of them obtained grades between 4.5 and 5.0. With respect to task performance, in cohort 1

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62.5% of the participants reached grades between 4.4 and 4.8 while in cohort 2 84.3% of them reached grades between 4.6 and 5.0.

The aforementioned results demonstrated that fostering the use of the WPA, along with assessment strategies such as formative assessment and rubrics, can significantly improve undergraduates' academic writing proficiency level. Also, these findings indicate that reinforcing feedback can boost the quality level of the essays which means that peer review might be essential for learners' progress. Most importantly, Marulanda and Martínez (2017) suggest that having continuous practice and exposure to the Writing Process Approach may guarantee apprentices' awareness on the task requirements.

Applying the WPA as a tool to improve writing composition in a second language was not only implemented by Marulanda and Martínez (2017), but also by Akinwamide (2012) who stated that the process-oriented approach enables students to write independently, transforming the writing process into an exciting and engaging experience. This research aimed at determining to what extent its findings can contribute to the writing skill development of bilingual speakers. Therefore, Akinwamide decided to evaluate essays from 80 senior students from two public secondary schools located in Nigeria. According to him, the product-oriented approach merely provides students with good examples, which does not mean they will learn to write properly. In contrast, the Process-Oriented-Approach allows students to know about the sequence of procedures a competent writer must undertake so they achieve success in writing. In regard to the methodology, the participants presented two Senior School Certificate Examination Tests, a pre-test and a post-test. The 80 individuals belonged to two groups, one received instruction on the Process-Oriented-Approach for six weeks (experimental group), and the other was used to compare the advances (control group).

The results lead to three meaningful conclusions: (1) teaching the Process-Oriented-Approach empowers students to develop primary writing skills and sub-skills throughout the

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learning process; (2) peer review and editing, two fundamental stages of the process approach, have been identified as mediators that have a positive impact in written production; (3) “Finally, the act of composing and generating ideas strengthen originality. Originality berates plagiarism hence the Process Approach which favors the ability to generate ideas may do a lot to sustain academic integrity” (Akinwamide, 2012, p.23). Therefore, changing the Product-Oriented-Approach to the Process-Oriented-Approach for academic writing instruction shows improvement in terms of content, language use, and motivation among students.

The findings presented by Marulanda and Martinez (2017) and Akinwande (2012) can be supported through the analysis done by Costas (2002) of two writing samples under the light of the WPA. This paper developed the idea that focusing only on spelling, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary is not the best way to teach academic writing as there are some other aspects that need to be taken into account to correctly complete a writing task. To reinforce his hypothesis, he presented the samples analyzed to more than 200 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, and the vast majority agreed that proofreading the linguistic elements was enough to fulfill the assignment requirements. However, Costas (2002) suggested that apart from revising the aforesaid aspects, it is also necessary to identify the audience, the purpose, the type of text, and the prompt, which are aspects taken into account in the Writing Process Approach. Coming back to the conception of writing as a cyclical process which comprises several stages, the author highlighted the importance of planning before writing, making an initial draft, and receiving feedback during the process. This is due to the fact that these three steps helped writers organize, complete and adjust their first productions. Costas provided further information about the roles of those who give and receive feedback as well as the components this must possess.

2.2.2 Genre-based Approach to Writing. Other studies that offer alternatives to enhance academic writing are Yasuda (2011), Chala and Chapetón (2013), and Yang (2016) who applied the genre-based approach to instruct university students in composition courses. This approach postulates that features such as the audience, the purpose, the type of text, the author's style and register play a vital role in determining how to compose texts appropriately. The studies' findings corroborate the high correlation between implementing genre-based instruction and the improvement of students' written products.

Chala and Chapetón (2013) conducted an action research project which was driven by the necessity of transforming academic writing into a practice that would allow college students to share their knowledge worldwide. The authors used a set of genre-based activities to later describe its impact on argumentative essays written by 15 students from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in a Teaching of Modern Languages program whose students' ages ranged between 17 and 23 years old; these participants were in sixth semester and had a high intermediate English proficiency level. The activities designed were divided into three stages which corresponded to the three cohorts of the semester.

For this study, the authors applied a six-step writing process proposed by Widodo's (2006) which included an exploration of the types of texts (argumentative, expository, and reflective) to categorize the structure, peer interaction to build knowledge of the topic at hand, a presentation of an initial draft, an evaluation, a correction stage, and a final publication of the papers. The data was collected through video recordings of 16 classes, pre and post questionnaires, analysis of students' works, and semi-structured interviews in each of the cohorts. The analysis of the results displayed three main findings; first, making various drafts raised students' awareness on the cyclicity of the composition process. Secondly, constant peer feedback allowed students to improve their language use and take an active role in their partners' writing processes. Finally, showing learners written productions of each

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genre (argumentative, expository and reflective) was shown to be an excellent strategy to guide students through the process of writing. Such findings shed light on the importance of using genre-based activities for writing instruction to improve students' attitudes towards writing and increase their abilities to address international issues with a critical attitude.

Similarly, Yasuda (2011) conducted a study that attempted to analyze how novice foreign language writers become aware of genres in a writing course after being exposed to a genre-based syllabus. This study took place in a private scientific university in Japan where 70 students with a lower intermediate proficiency level attended 15 composition classes. Two questionnaires were used to determine the participants' previous experiences with writing, and it was found that the learners' L2 writing skills were as poorly developed as their L1 writing skills. In regard to the methodology, the design of the syllabus included a sequence of activities targeted to exercise the communicative and linguistic competences of students through the identification of the respective language and structure of the task.

To carry out the study, the 15 sessions were divided into three groups which corresponded respectively to input, practice and follow-up stages. In addition, during the input stage, the teachers used samples whose tone, style, formality and language changes were easily identified by the students, so they could have a reference to start writing their products. The qualitative and quantitative data collection methods chosen for this project were surveys and interviews as well as pre and posttests. Once the results from each method were averaged, the impact of the genre-based approach was not only evident in the students' genre-awareness and language use, but also with respect to their perception of writing. For instance, 88.6% of the participants agreed on the fact that this pedagogy helped them improve their writing skills since they no longer considered writing as a tedious task, but as a supported process where learning always occurs.

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According to Yasuda (2011), the findings suggested that applying the genre-based approach to teach writing is one effective route to increase students' genre and linguistic awareness. Moreover, he stated that guiding foreign language learners' writing processes by using this approach will provide students with opportunities to gain proficiency in other aspects. For instance, there will be an improvement on genre-specific language choices as well as an enhancement of audience awareness. Besides, writing fluency and grammar will be greater after the second time of developing genre-oriented tasks.

Although the previous studies bolster the efficacy of teaching writing to tertiary students through the genre-based approach, Yang (2016) reviewed a variety of research papers where other advantages that reinforce this belief were found. By revising this literature, the author's main purpose went beyond showing benefits, and dealt with how the genre-based pedagogy could be used in textbook organization, classroom instruction, and teaching concepts. The writer also explored the meaning of genre in the language learning field; he understood genre as a communicative event that has a specific discourse, audience and purpose as well as language patterns, content and style. Together with Yasuda (2011), this article promotes the teachers' understanding of the use and variations of the different genres in order to obtain the expected results from the implementation of this method.

Yang (2016) discussed the following advantages of genre-based instruction: (1) writers and readers strengthen their intercultural competence as the audience is considered; (2) students feel supported in the most challenging tasks as peer interaction is promoted; (3) even though the focus is on writing, the other language skills are developed. However, unlike Chala and Chapetón (2013) and Yasuda (2011), this research shows some of the possible inconveniences that may arise when teachers put into practice the genre-based approach. To exemplify, he suggests that it is fundamental to work on discourse comprehension and analysis since it is the weakest ability among foreign language university students. Despite

the fact that this method is highly recommended by several authors (Marshall, 1991; Chen & Su, 2011), the existent research is insufficient to address the demands that the academia requires. Therefore, researchers should conduct studies where the genre-based approach is applied to reinforce writing as well as discourse comprehension and analysis.

2.2.3 Formative Assessment. Throughout the last decades, finding the key elements for a rewarding instruction of writing in college has become one of the main concerns among educators inasmuch as it is the language skill that has the lowest results in language proficiency exams (Lyon, Wylie, Brockway & Mavronikolas, 2018). Indeed, recent attempts have demonstrated that “an important component of effective writing instruction is good assessment practice” (Beck, Llosa, Black & Anderson, 2018, p. 68). In other words, the better designed the assessment method is, the faster students' writing mistakes disappear. In this context, Muñoz, Palacio and Escobar (2012), Brookhart (2013), and Beck, Llosa, Black and Anderson (2018) have demonstrated that in order to get fruitful results in composition courses, it is essential to use formative assessment as an evaluation method.

Mindful of the importance of formative assessment to improve writing instruction and evaluation, Beck, Llosa, Black and Anderson (2018) conducted a study with the purpose of examining to what extent a formative assessment tool, called Think-Aloud-Protocol (TAP) facilitates the identification of learners' writing difficulties in contrast to traditional instruction and product-oriented assessments. This research was supported on theoretical foundations of similar studies (Andrade, Du, & Wang, 2008; Cosner, 2011) about the nature of academic writing, its challenges, and the best way to assess it. First, the researchers suggested that assessment can only be considered as formative if the results lead to feedback or changes in future instructions. Secondly, the authors, relying on a systematic review of research on formative assessment done by Black & Wiliam (1998), stated that formative assessment practices help lower-achieving students raise their grades. There was an emphasis

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on the close relation between rubrics and formative assessment: both contribute to the improvement of the students' writing. Nonetheless, they exposed the limitations that an unfocused rubric can produce, such as the shallow criteria when revising compositions, and the lack of importance given to the process of writing.

Five teachers and 15 foreign language students from public schools in New York City who were enrolled in ninth and tenth grade participated in this research. The data was collected through an initial and a final interview as well as the implementation of the TAP, which consisted of recording the interview and analyzing the answers produced while the students were writing an argumentative essay. In the preliminary interview, the teachers were asked to determine the most frequent writing issues on learners' writing samples and propose a solution based on their own teaching practices. In the follow-up interview, the same questions were asked, but the teachers' viewpoints were different regarding the focus of their assessment practices. In other words, they started to integrate the writing process steps into the criteria. As a matter of fact, the results revealed that the educators overlooked some relevant aspects of the writing process such as outlining and revising and gave more importance to the final version of the text. Additionally, the teachers were able to recognize writing problems which had been overlooked with other assessment methodologies, and most importantly, they were able to provide more effective feedback.

Muñoz, Palacio and Escobar (2012) see formative assessment as a goal for academic writing at the university level. Nevertheless, in contrast to Beck, Llosa, Black and Anderson's (2018) research, this study looked into Colombian teachers' beliefs about assessment and the congruence between their perceptions and practices. Even though both studies are grounded on similar theoretical basis, Muñoz, Palacio and Escobar (2012) regard traditional and formative assessment as administrative and pedagogical assessment. In view of the fact that the participation of in-service teachers was needed, 62 tutors who worked in the adult English

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program of the language center at a Colombian private tertiary education institution were part of the research. Surveys, interviews and reports were used to collect the qualitative data. The design of the survey and interview included statements that sought to establish the teachers' preference of assessment (pedagogical or administrative), and the role of assessment in students' improvement and teachers' instruction. The majority of participants had positive attitudes towards formative assessments, but they still implemented traditional-assessment techniques due to a lack of ability of putting into practice new strategies. Hence, the authors suggested doing further research on formative assessment as a means of improving teaching and learning standards.

Brookhart (2013) presented a set of considerations and recommendations that must be taken into account in the designing of scoring criteria. To begin with, she prioritized the use of "student-friendly language" to describe the learning targets, so learners can keep in mind the task's aim. Furthermore, the author proposed to share the rubric's criteria when the product involves higher-order thinking skills such as thinking, writing, and analyzing. However, merely sharing is often not enough as students need to internalize what they are expected to do through activities that require teacher-student interaction. Therefore, Brookhart (2013) suggested four main activities to educators : (1) ask students to pose clarifying questions about the rubrics; (2) ask students to state the rubrics in their own words; (3) ask students to match samples of work to rubrics; (4) explore and teach one criterion at a time. To conclude, she closed this section by claiming that "sharing learning targets is the first and foundational strategy for formative assessment. It is also an outstanding strategy for effective writing instruction" (Brookhart, 2013, p. 101).

2.2.4 Error Analysis in Academic Writing. In addition to the approaches that have been explained throughout this literature review, there is still one element that can meaningfully influence the academic writing performance among college students. Error

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analysis is a fundamental mechanism in writing instruction since it directly pinpoints the most frequent errors students make. Once teachers know these problematic areas, they can make the necessary adjustments to teaching and learning processes to avoid their future recurrence. In order to increase the quality of foreign language learners' academic compositions, Sajid & Siddiqui (2015), Sajid (2016), Singh, Singh, Razak and Ravinthar (2017) conducted studies to categorize the types of writing mistakes found in EFL/ESL students' written products.

Sajid & Siddiqui (2015) and Sajid (2016) are longitudinal studies that aimed at gauging the frequency of word choice and register errors in postgraduate EFL writers' research papers from Pakistan, as well as at offering a short description of causes, effects and suggestions. Both corpuses consisted of 40 research articles about social and medical sciences, and 40 research articles about information technology and computer sciences and business and management sciences. The categories evaluated were diction, poor expression, preposition, punctuation, redundancy, sub-v-agreement, singular/plural, unparallel structure, word form, verb tense and others. The authors developed these studies under the premise that academic writing is an indispensable skill that boosts students' performance in higher education. They also stated that research is the essence of academic writing as it allows the investigators to write about social situations that are interesting for them. Finally, reading is deemed as the starting point to improve writing skills, which in turn, reinforces reading comprehension. While the students read thoroughly, they acquire as much academic vocabulary as possible, being this a way to overcome the lack of lexicon.

All samples were individually analyzed, and the errors were categorized according to the type and the frequency of appearance. After that, the information was averaged and organized in graphics and charts that presented punctuation, word choice, register, and prepositions as the most alarming errors. Indeed, 71% of all the errors found belong to those

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four categories. Based on the aforementioned results, Sajid & Siddiqui (2015) and Sajid (2016) offered three main recommendations. First, error analysis helps students see explicitly the rules of the English language. Secondly, extensive reading should be assigned, so learners have a reference for certain genre-based terms, expressions and meaning of words. Lastly, writing should be guided by a content-based approach rather than writing for the sake of writing. In that way, students will enhance their interest in research and increase their academic/specialized vocabulary.

Singh, Singh, Razak and Ravinthar (2017) focused their study on the most common grammatical errors made by ESL students in written form. In this case study, even though they try to cover the majority of errors presented in college students' written productions, there is still an emphasis on those that occur very frequently. The population was a group of 144 graduate students who were presenting a university entrance exam. The authors influenced by previous studies (Calkins, 1980; DiStefano & Killion, 1984; Harris, 1962) strongly believed that the best way to teach grammar is to use students' own products as examples. Despite the fact that grammar is extensively taught in formal classroom contexts, educators need to inform their students about the mistakes they make, their causes and the ways to eradicate them. Moreover, the researchers stated that the quality of the written texts depends on external factors such as the environment and the writer's emotional state. Ultimately, since writing in a second language is a cognitively demanding task, it needs more involvement and guidance from the teacher.

The papers collected from the college entrance exam were qualitatively analyzed, which implied the evaluation of content. The analysis of the data revealed the following results. Subject-verb agreement, verb tense, noun, preposition, adjective, article, pronoun, adverbs and conjunctions were the nine most typical grammatical errors made by the ESL students. In accordance with this, "errors are expected in the process of learning and it is very

important to identify the cause behind their occurrence” (Singh, Singh, Razak & Ravinthar, 2017, p. 25). As a final recommendation, teachers are encouraged to provide feedback and make students rewrite those texts that have been corrected.

2.2.5 Transferability in Writing. Transferability of writing skills across-tasks and curricula is not only one of the main goals for curriculum designers, but also for teachers since these abilities are a permanent requirement in academia. However, although good writing skills are expected in all tertiary education students' compositions, the majority of learners have not fully developed them. For this reason, for the sake of finding the best way to ensure high quality texts cross-curricularly, authors such as Justice, Rice, and Warry (2009), and Amiryousefi (2017) have carried out investigations where some of the components for fostering transferability of writing skills are evidenced.

Aiming at displaying the efficacy of enhancing self-directed learning skills in a first year Inquiry-based seminar course for reinforcing the development and transferability of academic writing skills, Justice, Rice, and Warry (2009) conducted a mixed method research. For this study, the authors considered that “in broadest terms, transfer of learning occurs when previously learned knowledge and skills affect the way new knowledge and skills are learned and performed” (Cormier and Hagman, 1987 as cited by Justice, Rice, and Warry 2009, p.2). The investigation is based on the premise that there are knowledge and abilities that can be acquired in one setting and be applied in another situation with similar conditions. There were 125 social studies' students who were divided into two groups: learners who did and did not take the first year Inquiry-based seminar course. The course's objective was to train students to develop learning tools and strategies that could help them improve their performance in the rest of their program' subjects. The data was collected from two texts: (1) a paper students considered was excellent; (2) a narrative-descriptive text where students explained the process they used to write the aforementioned written piece.

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The qualitative and quantitative data analysis was collected by having the 250 papers assessed by external raters who focused their attention on determining whether participating on the course improved students' writing skills in a long term or not; aspects such as discourse, structure, information accuracy, and self-directed skills were also taken into account. In other words, they decided whether or not the course helped learners transfer specific knowledge and abilities. The results demonstrated that not only did students who were enrolled in the course have more self-directed skills, but also that in order to boost transferability in any field, it was necessary to make transferability a basis for the syllabus design.

In recent years, Amiryousefi (2017) conducted a study that acknowledged transferability, but with a stronger focus on writing skills. This research was grounded on the following components: computer-mediated communication, task transfer, and pre-task writing. Firstly, Amiryousefi (2017) stated that computer-mediated communication revitalizes L2 writing instruction by allowing students not only to write in less-threatening environments, but also to collaborate with their partners in online scenarios. Another key concept that was described in the study was the task transferability which refers to the degree in which performance on a pedagogical task can be transmitted to other contexts. Lastly, since pre-writing is seen as a way to diminish students' cognitive load when starting to write, and thus, facilitate the production of new knowledge in the second language, the authors investigated three types of pre-task planning methods: individual, group, and teacher-guided planning. The purpose of this research was to determine the impact of using these three ways of planning through EFL learners' computer-mediated L2 written production as well as to measure the writing skills transferability from the first task to one of similar difficulty.

The participants of this investigation comprised 76 EFL randomly chosen students who had to compose two writing tasks. For the first task, students were assigned one of the

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previously mentioned planning modalities which means they received different instructions to develop the pre-writing stage. One week later, the same groups were asked to write another similar task, but this time, they had the option to skip the planning stage if desired. By means of an online platform, researchers evaluated fluency, complexity, and accuracy in students' texts. ANOVA, a statistical tool to analyze quantitative data in regard to errors at the sentence level was used. After the information was triangulated, results revealed that using different types of pre-writing may influence several L2 writing knowledge dimensions such as syntax, conventions, and vocabulary. Also, having students write similar tasks under different conditions can generate the transferability of various linguistic abilities depending on the technique used.

After analyzing the preceding studies about the effectiveness of implementing the Writing Process Approach, genre-based approach, formative assessment and rubrics, error analysis in EFL classes, and promoting transferability of writing skills, we can conclude that using these methods in EFL college classrooms can potentially maximize students' writing abilities to the point of meeting the current tertiary education requirements and other worldwide writing standards. The careful selection of materials and components for a curriculum also influences to what extent transferability of writing skills can take place. Indeed, including these approaches as the basis of an academic writing reference handbook will not only reduce learners' mistakes and foster the necessary academic writing skills in the English Teacher Preparation Program from Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, but will also help professors choose the most effective writing instruction and assessment methods.

3. Methodology

3.1 Type of Research

The collection and analysis of data was done by means of multiple instruments. As a matter of fact, this research combined features from the two most utilized methodological paradigms, quantitative and qualitative. On the one hand, quantitative research consists of data collection procedures that yield results measurable through statistical methods (Dörnyei, 2007). On the other hand, qualitative research makes use of several approaches that analyze the experiences, judgements, and behaviors of human beings (Clissett, 2008). The mixed method research as proposed by Caracelli in Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2017) “is one that plainly juxtaposes different methods (qualitative and quantitative) to provide a more elaborated understanding of the phenomenon of interest (including its context) and to gain greater confidence in the conclusions generated by the evaluation study” (p.119).

Our project was a mixed method research since it made use of interviews to gather information about the participants' perceptions in relation to the incorporation of the writing process approach, genre-based approach, and formative assessment in the Academic Writing Reference Handbook (AWRH). Questionnaires were implemented to compile quantitative data about students' points of view in regard to the support these elements give to their writing skills. Numerical information was also collected from written samples in order to compare students' writing performance before and after the implementation of this tool. Triangulating the different data (quantitative and qualitative) was necessary to increase the project's consistency, validity, and soundness.

3.2 Type of Study

Considering all the aspects that comprised the design and implementation of this project, it can be regarded as a case study, which according to Merriam (2009) “is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an

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institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p.10). In this sense, the boundaries that delimited the “case” that this research addressed were clearly defined as it was focused on eighth semester students who were enrolled in a course that involved writing in a Bilingual Teaching Program. This population was selected from among students whose compositions clearly illustrated the writing deficiency. As they studied Academic Writing in sixth semester and had the chance to show their writing abilities again in the eighth semester, we could evaluate their initial state and the progress they had made throughout the process.

Yin (1994) further suggests that one of the main characteristics of case studies is that “they can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence” (p.13). Hence, our study directly met case studies conditions as it included numerical and perceptual data collection methods that were used to determine the effectiveness of the AWRH in increasing participants’ transferability of academic writing skills from the academic writing course to other courses. Yin (1994) enriched this definition by saying that a case study looks for deepening in current problems found in real-life situations related to the context chosen. Emphasizing writing issues regarding conventions, syntax, organization, vocabulary, and discourse that the students from this program allowed researchers to provide new insights into this contemporary issue.

Within the different types of case studies, this investigation fell into the category of single case study as a critical case given the fact that it departed from prior investigations which removed any possible obstacles for implementing new strategies (Yin, 1994). The AWRH was founded on the results of a previous study that implemented the writing process approach, genre-based approach, and systematized feedback as methodologies to guide second language students’ writing development. The present research project aimed at implementing this instructional material in order to know whether the students’ compositions were modified, and if so, to what extent these changes benefited their writing production

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skills. Stake (2005) complemented Yin's idea by proposing the instrumental category to refer to studies that clarify complex issues. In this research some cross-curricular solutions were proposed to increase the quality of academic writing production in the Bilingual Teaching Program. Indeed, the AWRH components covered a variety of writing aspects that could be extrapolated to any academic domain.

3.3 Context

This research project was conducted at Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira (UTP) which is a public, state, and co-educational research university located in the southeast of Pereira city. At the time of the implementation, this university contained 14.4 hectares of Botanical Garden, 20 buildings, and sports facilities as well as an observatory and an amphitheater. The UTP was founded in 1958 and started operating in 1961 with a student body that has been increasing since then. This institution had a well-established administrative system led by the Rector Luis Fernando Gaviria Trujillo.

It hosted more than 18.000 students and 1358 professors from 25 masters programs, six technologies, two professionalizations, 14 specializations, and 25 undergraduate and five postgraduate programs which were established in the fulfillment of the institution's motto: "Science and Technology at the service of Humanity, tutelage by freedom". The Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con énfasis en Inglés had 605 students and 39 professors.

3.4 Setting

This section aims at describing the specific course involved in this research project. The Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés had 49 courses, thirty of which were carried out in English. Among this diversity of subjects, there were some courses that fit the requirements to carry out the research. For instance, the Classroom Language Assessment course promotes the development of students' metacognitive processes as well as their academic writing skills for composing reflective and descriptive texts. For this reason, this

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investigation involved two groups from the Classroom Language Assessment Course which were guided by one professor, and their time intensity was four hours a week. Lastly, the material that was used to develop this study is an Academic Writing Reference Handbook (AWRH) created by the researchers, who in turn, monitored the handbook's implementation and collected and analyzed the information.

3.5 Participants

In this section, we will describe the population involved in the project which included undergraduate students and a professor. Also, the number of participants and their main characteristics such as age, gender, academic background will be presented as well as the reasons why they were chosen and how they were selected.

The population of this research comprised 16 undergraduate students. The students belonged to a mixed gender group of Spanish native speakers whose ages ranged between 18 and 21 years old. They were learners who had already taken Academic Writing and were then enrolled in the Classroom Language Assessment Course, which was a subject taken in the eighth semester of this teacher preparation program. According to the traffic lighting test carried out at the program, their English language proficiency level was B1.2. On the other hand, although a Ph. D. professor participated in this study, she was not a source of any data; she had been working at this university for four years and was guiding the Academic Writing class, and recently, the Classroom Language Assessment course where she allowed researchers to execute this project. She had a Bachelor of Arts in Communication, a Masters' Degree in International Affairs, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

The sampling selection, in terms of characteristics and number, is always determined by the focus of the research. Although this research project was a mixed method case study, it was more oriented towards the qualitative component. Merriam (1998) stated that for qualitative research, the non-probability sampling is the most beneficial; she also suggested

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that this type of sampling facilitates answering questions that looked to establish the implications that performing certain actions have. The research question that guided this investigation intended to determine the impact of the implementation of the Academic Writing Reference Handbook on students' writing skills. Like Merriam, Dörnyei (2007) proposed several categories that derived from non-probability sampling; in this case, we focused on Convenience or opportunity sampling which is the most frequently used in L2 research. Dörnyei (2007) defined it as the population that meets favorable conditions for the researcher such as the geographical location, the time availability, or willingness to participate. Taking this into account, the participants were selected because they made part of the researchers' immediate context and possessed specific features: (1) they studied the Academic Writing course; (2) they were enrolled in the Classroom Language Assessment Course; (3) they had available time to participate; (4) their writing skills were at an average level.

The number of students that participated in this project was in accordance with the number recommended by Dörnyei (2007) for experimental procedures which is at least 15 people. It was decided to have 16 participants who were chosen out of 42 students. It was believed that having a small group of students would not provide enough reliability to the results of the study. However, Patton (1990) argued that "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p.185). This suggests that the sample size did not affect the study's outcomes, instead, the resultant insights relied on the researchers' data collection methods and data analysis effectiveness.

3.5.1 Researchers' role. The researchers' level of involvement may vary depending on the methodology of the investigation which can go from low to high involvement.

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According to Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012), “higher levels of involvement may include helping in instrument development, data collection, and data analysis; participating in data interpretation; making recommendations for further research; actively participating in designing the study; formulating the problem of concern; even initiating the research effort”(p. 592). In this case, the centerpiece of this case study was the creation of the AWRH, so it required the researchers to have a high involvement since they participated in the design, refinement, and application of this product.

We identified the main writing issues that affected the students' written compositions, and then incorporated into the AWRH some solutions found in the Academic Writing course. For the implementation stage, we guaranteed the use of the handbook in each class by reminding the professor in charge to apply the approaches proposed in this tool. In relation to the data collection, we not only designed and implemented the interviews and questionnaires, but also collected and analyzed the writing samples. Lastly, we interpreted the data gathered in order to draw conclusions about the impact of the AWRH on the students' writing skills. We were trained researchers, as stated by Berg in Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012), in view of the fact that we were in continuous contact with the community under study. In fact, we not only monitored the process, but also assisted with pedagogical material when needed.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

The aim of this section is to present the data collection instruments, describe their structure, and illustrate their use throughout the project. Since the purpose of this research was not only to measure the impact of an AWRH in the transferability of academic writing skills in 16 students who belonged to one undergraduate course, but also to determine the influence it had in their academic texts, it was of paramount importance to select instruments that could gather the participants' perceptions and opinions as well as their writing

characteristics. Therefore, interviews, questionnaires, and written samples were chosen to collect the aforementioned information.

3.6.1 Interviews. According to deMarrais (2004) an interview is “a process in which a researcher and a participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p.55), which makes the conversation have a structure and a purpose (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). As stated by Patton (2015) interviews are used to gather information about invisible phenomena such as the participants’ perceptions; thus, students were interviewed at the end of the implementation process of this study. The interviews were carried out once, and their purpose was to know if students considered the Academic Writing Reference Handbook (AWRH) had helped them transfer writing skills from the academic writing course to their current courses and assignments.

The type of interview used in this research study was the semi-structured interview which, as stated by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), allows the interviewer to post more flexible questions than other types of interviews such as the structured interview. In this way, students’ responses were not limited to certain pre-established categories, which helped the researchers collect more accurate qualitative data about the transferability of the 16 students’ skills. (See Appendix A)

3.6.2 Questionnaires. In addition to interviews, used to collect qualitative data, questionnaires were used to obtain some of the quantitative information for this research. Brown (2001) describes questionnaires as instruments with questions and statements respondents have to respond to, either by producing their own written answers or by choosing from a list of already created answers. Generally, the information collected through this type of survey is quantitatively analyzed due to the fact that it mostly includes closed-ended questions which are particularly effective to gather statistical and numerical results. However,

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a qualitative analysis of the responses can also be possible if the designers include open-ended questions (Dörnyei, 2007).

The questionnaire used in this study was given to the 16 students after implementing the AWRH, and it was focused on measuring the impact that this handbook had in the students' academic writing skills. The questionnaire, which was executed virtually, included questions regarding the effectiveness of the handbook on improving not only the students writing skills, but also the quality of their texts. Additionally, the survey had questions that allowed the researchers to determine the specific writing issues that were overcome after having implemented the AWRH.

3.6.3 Written Samples. Finally, the participants' reflective and descriptive written samples were selected as the third instrument to collect information. In order to extract data concerning students' writing performance, a list of errors related to discourse, organization, syntax, conventions, and vocabulary was used. It allowed the researchers to compare the changes in the 16 students' written composition after being exposed to the AWRH, which in turn, provided numerical evidence. We analyzed 64 samples, half of them were collected before implementing the AWRH and the rest were collected at the end of the study.

In view of the fact that discourse, organization, syntax, conventions, and vocabulary include a wide range of elements, a compendium of specific errors that belonged to each category was organized in a list. In this way, it was possible to mark the particular errors made in each text and their frequency. For instance, discourse errors covered issues from content accuracy to genre awareness; similarly, conventions ranged from grammatical inconsistencies to punctuation and capitalization. (See complete list of errors in Appendix C)

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Owing the fact that working with human population (in this case, 16 students and one professor) required the researchers to follow certain ethical considerations, a 10-item

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checklist proposed by Patton (2002) was used as a guide in this study. The checklist goes as follows: (1) explaining purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used; (2) promises and reciprocity; (3) risk assessment; (4) confidentiality; (5) informed consent; (6) data access and ownership; (7) interviewer mental health; (8) advice; (9) data collection; (10) ethical vs. legal. The purpose of this section is to explain how the aforementioned aspects are reflected on this investigation.

Knowing the objectives of a study was not only necessary for the researchers, but also for the population involved since it guaranteed that both were acquainted with the process. In this case, the students and the professor were notified of this project's procedure and goals as well as the role they would play throughout the investigation. For instance, the participants knew that they were expected to use the Academic Writing Reference Handbook as a support to compose their texts. Similarly, they were told that at the end of the process, they were going to be interviewed, and their compositions were going to be analyzed.

The individuals needed to keep in mind what they would obtain after participating; for that reason, they were told that their contributions would help researchers and professors create new methodologies for academic writing instruction and learning at the university. Indeed, we emphasized the fact that the participants' writing skills were going to improve after being part of this investigation.

Another important aspect to consider were the risks to which participants were exposed. However, after an evaluation of this project's methodology, it was determined that it was not going to jeopardize the participants' integrity. Since students' compositions were required in the Classroom Language Assessment Course, they were not asked to produce additional texts; thus, they were not going to have extra academic loads.

Confidentiality was a priority for the researchers as the students and the professors had the right to remain anonymous. Hence, the researchers made sure to codify the

individuals' names and the data collected through the interviews, questionnaires, and written samples. In order to avoid inconveniences regarding the use of the data collected, all participants agreed to sign an informed consent where they were explicitly informed about the project's characteristics, and the data analysis procedures. (See Appendix D)

Apart from this, they were apprised of the freedom they had to quit the project if desired and/or needed. Besides, only the researchers and their advisor from the university could access the raw information, so data was not inappropriately divulged. In spite of the fact that most of the ethical considerations were focused on the participants' safety, there was one that looked for maintaining researchers' mental health. In other words, there was concern about avoiding investigators' high levels of stress during stages such as the design, data collection and analysis, and report of findings. Finally, even though it is recommended to create a legal framework for research studies, we agreed with what Merriam (2009) stated: "it is ultimately up to the individual researcher to proceed as ethically as possible" (p. 230). Therefore, the researchers were committed to protect the information, avoid bias in interpretation, and present final results opportunely.

3.8 Data Analysis

In view of the fact that this is a mixed method research, interviews, questionnaires, and written samples were chosen as data collection methods since they allowed researchers to gather both qualitative and quantitative information. Among different alternatives, Grounded Theory (GT) proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was the methodology followed to triangulate the input collected throughout this investigation. Although GT has been mostly used in qualitative research, it also works in quantitative studies because it looks for constructing theory based on any type of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In other words, this methodology permits the implementation of several data collection techniques that enable researchers to compare in detail qualitative and quantitative information to answer the

research questions. In GT studies, the most important elements are codification and analysis of data which are done through constant comparative methods. These procedures are: comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory. However, in order to fit the requirements of this study, it was necessary to include more stages. These were the steps followed for the data analysis:

3.8.1 Transcription. In view of the fact that interviews are instruments to collect data through guided conversations, the participants' responses were audio recorded. After that, the data was digitally transcribed to facilitate the information management.

3.8.2 Comparing lines applicable to each category. One of the most important steps of an effective data analysis is the coding as it allows researchers to dispose of information whenever necessary and organize it into the different categories that emerge during the process. For the purpose of this research, the qualitative and the quantitative data were coded separately.

3.8.2.1 Qualitative data coding. In this study, interviews were implemented to gather qualitative data. "The initial analysis of those data might involve CODING of interview transcripts to identify the variables, or patterns, that seem to be present within the manifestation of the phenomenon" (Sage publications, 2004, p. 3). Once the transcription was done, the incidents were labeled based on the instrument, participant, inquiry, line, and the inclination. The following code system "ISs1Q1L4P" was used to categorize the information: (1) "I" represents "interview"; (2) "Ss1" means "student number 1"; (3) "Q1" refers to "questions number 1"; and (4) "L4" stands for "line number 4". This is the initial stage of the grounded theory coding procedures, and it is called "open coding".

3.8.2.2 Quantitative data coding. Despite the fact that the GT admits the use of quantitative data, its coding process differs substantially. In fact, Charmaz (2006) affirmed

that “the logic of grounded theory coding differs from quantitative logic that applies preconceived categories or codes to the data” (p. 46). Thus, instead of formulating categories out of the data scrutiny, data is quantified and organized in different groups. With this in mind, since the answers from the questionnaires ranged within predetermined options such as yes/no and numerical scales, the information collected was tabulated (See Appendix B to check the questionnaire). Analyzing the samples with a list of errors provided the researchers with information about the participants' errors at a macro and micro level (See Appendix C).

3.8.3 Integrating categories and their properties. Charmaz (2006) recommended that in this stage, categories should be shaped by their power, purpose and pattern. In view of this, the properties of the macro categories were defined and designated with a title that represented their major components. Throughout the integration of categories, many subgroups were created with the expectation of finding new evidence to support them. However, when categories lacked enough incidents to validate their existence, they were discarded. In order to properly address the predominant categories, it was necessary to modify the titles based on the characteristics that were constantly added and/or removed. After integrating and modifying the refined categories, this stage also called “axial coding” was finished.

3.8.4 Delimiting the theory. At this point, many categories were combined since their properties were similar, which facilitated the data comparison process. For debugging non relevant information, some incidents were annulled while others that were more frequent were included. After repeating this procedure for several times, a variety of higher-level categories restricted information, and generalizations were easier to make. This is a process regarded as “selective coding” which allowed the construction of different self-explanatory categories.

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Heretofore, the categories passed through a rigorous process of refinement, so only the top tier categories were transformed into theory. Charmaz (2006) argues that “the potential strength of grounded theory lies in its analytic power to theorize how meanings, actions, and social structures are constructed” (p. 151). Taking this into account, the researchers were convinced that the process of data analysis was finished, and results could be shown. Through inductive reasoning, these results were molded into theory in order to contribute to the field of study.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Reasons for the Inconsistent and Superficial Interaction Students had with the Academic Writing Reference Handbook

In view of the fact that the nature of this study relied upon the interaction the participants had with the Academic Writing Reference Handbook (AWRH), students were expected to explore this pedagogical material to the extent they could know at least its components and their main characteristics. However, data showed that this interaction was neither as constant nor as thorough as believed, and that this phenomenon was the result of two principal factors, which will be explained below as sub-findings:

4.1.1 Students' Lack of Awareness in regard to Academic Writing Components Reduced their Interaction with the Handbook. Typically, when people approach textbooks, they have a pre-existing idea of what these sources could offer to them based on their needs. With this in mind, after analyzing the data collected from interviews, questionnaires and students' writing samples, we found that there is a lack of awareness in regard to what writing academically entails which made students ignore many important parts of the AWRH's content. Indeed, entries revealed that the participants were not mindful of the task requirements, linguistic demands, and implementation of the Writing Process Approach when writing academically in a second language as the majority of them directed their attention to the "Genre-based Approach: The Power of Purposeful Writing" chapter. This suggests that for them, it was enough to know the structure of each type of essays in order to create proper written compositions. This is further supported by the following interview's extract, and questionnaire's answer.

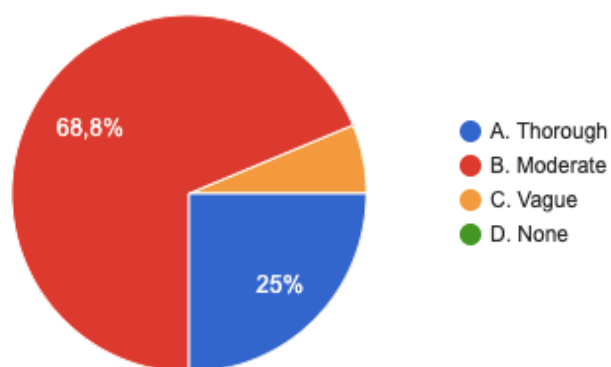


Figure 2. Students' level of interaction with the Academic Writing Reference Handbook.

IQ1S5L16-17: ... when I start [sic] doing the reflective paper, I used this book to design and to follow the structure. For this reason, I consider that [sic] is mild.

Firstly, *Figure 2* compiles the participants' answers in connection with the level of interaction they had with the handbook where it can be seen that the 68,8% of students affirmed their interaction was moderate. This percentage supports the assumption that even though students had the opportunity to deeply explore the content presented, they preferred to skip relevant chapters which decreased the impact of the AWRH on their compositional skills. On top of that, the aforementioned graphic and the interview's fragment corroborate that students not only insufficiently implemented the material, but also focused their attention around one chapter out of five. In other words, ignoring the amalgam of writing components and focusing only on the Genre-based Approach made them overlook other important compositional elements included in the book such as the process approach to writing, and the conventions, vocabulary and discourse needed to fulfill writing tasks' requirements. As a matter of fact, it is not enough including the components of each of the paragraphs depending on the essays' genre. The final purpose of writing is conveying meaning, and it cannot be achieved if writers inappropriately address the content and dismiss the basic foundations that allow communication in a second language.

4.1.2 Students' second language stabilization is a factor that affects the way students learn from pedagogical material. Based on the information yielded by the data collection methods, the second deciding factor that affected the interaction between the students and the AWRH was the students' stabilization of their language learning process. That is, they reached a plateau state which implies a sense of confidence with the language proficiency level achieved that does not only make students ignore the linguistic areas they need to improve, but also hinders them from learning more. As a result, the participants do not see the necessity of looking for strategies that could complement their already acquired language knowledge, in this case regarding writing, since they feel they are competent enough to meet the minimum communicative conditions. This stabilization also implies the normalization of their errors meaning that learners do not feel compelled to overcome them. This can be seen in the following excerpts from the data:

IQ2SIL19-22: Ahmmm, for example, Ahmm, I think that ahmmm at this point as I am comfortable writing in the way I do, that was one of the reasons that I don't [sic] take advantage of it, but, eh, the time I did, I feel we need to improve some aspects that ahmm we consider are fine ahmmm but actually they are not.

IQ1S2L14-18: Because I consider that my academic writing skills are not that bad, so I didn't find like too much need in the use of this. However, there are some things in the genre that sometimes you don't know... the structure of those type of essays, so maybe in those aspects I needed it, but it was not that intense... so for example it was just if I had some doubts in regards[sic] to the genre, I would search for it, but that's it.

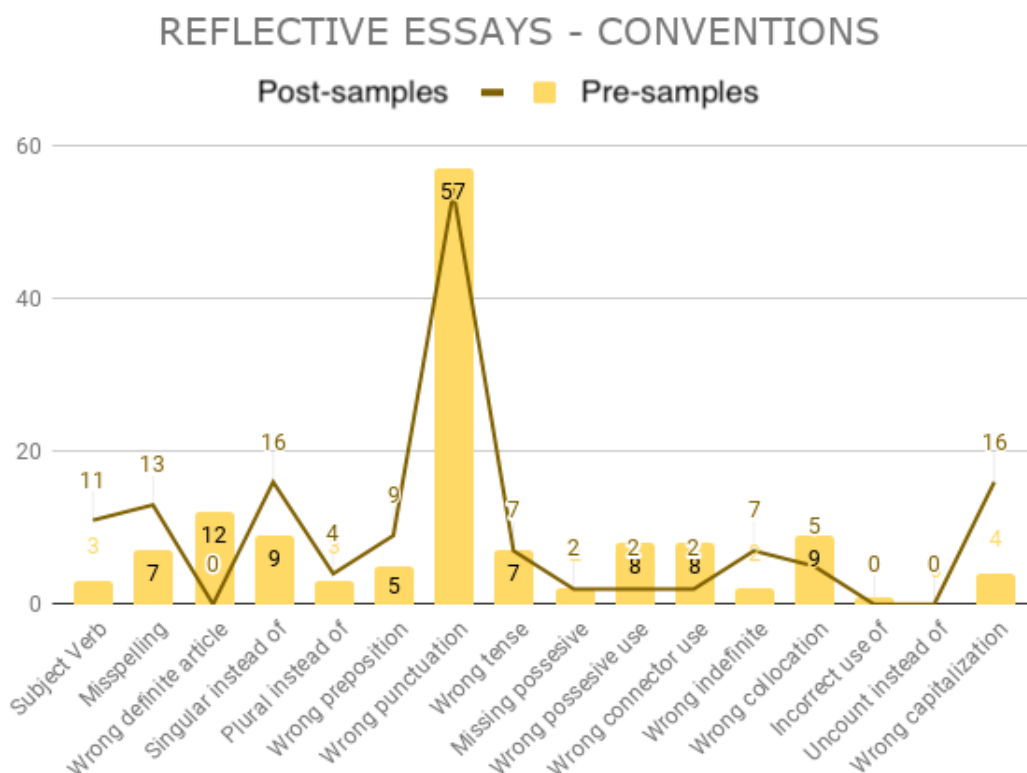


Figure 3. Error analysis of conventions in reflective essays.

Both interviews' samples clearly illustrate that students believe they have reached a sufficient writing level which impeded further learning from the AWRH. Yet, the participants did accept that they could have improved certain features if they would have had the willingness to address these issues with the help of the handbook. Bearing this in mind, this situation may be also caused by the fact that these are eight semester students whose main focus is no longer second language development, but theoretical and pedagogical knowledge acquisition. Moreover, in order for students to overcome this tendency, they must face a challenging task that forces them to improve their language skills. To exemplify this, in *IQIS2L14-18*, the student explicitly mentioned that as his writing knowledge gaps were not severe enough, he did not use the handbook to find a solution to these writing problems. On the other hand, the students' normalization of errors added to their reluctance to take

advantage of the material is perceived in the low conventions-improvement rate shown in *Figure 3*; in this project, conventions is a category that encompasses errors related to punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and other grammatical features. Different from the genre related errors, the graphic presents how the lack of attention to this area worsened the students' performance in such essential components of writing.

From of this data, we can restate that factors such as the students' lack of awareness regarding the elements included in academic writing, and the stabilization of the language learning processes affected the interaction the participants had with the handbook; therefore, the level of positive impact of the handbook over students' writing knowledge was limited. Gass and Selinker (2008) argued that "the more learners are made aware of unacceptable speech, the greater the opportunity is for them to make appropriate modifications" (p.360). If students had considered all the components of academic writing and reflected upon their writing problems, they would have benefited more from the AWRH. Furthermore, when learners normalize their linguistic errors, they do not correct them. Accordingly, not until students are explicitly exposed to grammatical rules, their errors are identified as areas for improvement (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Finally, Selinker (1992) as cited in Wang (2008) claimed that "errors are indispensable to learners since the making of errors can be regarded as 'a device' the learner uses in order to learn" (p. 184). However, the students in this project overlooked their errors instead of improving them, so the handbook could not serve as a correcting tool.

4.2 Professors' Mediation as Essential Component for Students' Proper Use of Pedagogical Material

From a broader perspective, advanced second language students develop a series of cognitive skills that allow them to create strategies to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge. These strategies are more applicable when the pedagogical materials used in their

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classes are connected to their immediate educational circumstances. Nonetheless, we discovered that despite the fact that the AWRH was designed based on the participants' academic context and writing needs, the professor's use of the handbook to guide students through their writing tasks needed to be more explicit and extensive.

Learners' already developed methodologies to maximize the usefulness of learning resources were not enough to apply the content presented in the AWRH into their writing tasks. As a consequence, students can make connections among prior knowledge and new writing strategies. They need a writing instructor that help students make that bridge between the information found in the handbook and the tasks required in the writing course or other scenarios. This is corroborated by these portions of quantitative and qualitative data:

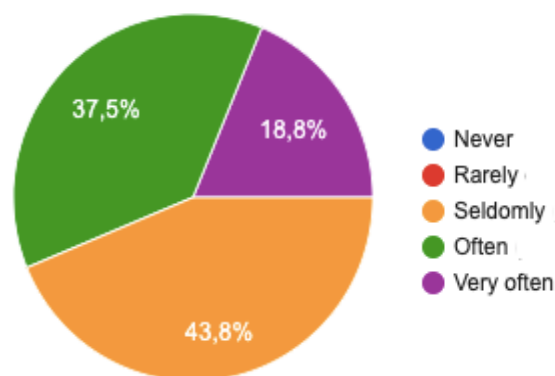


Figure 4. Students' frequency of use of the Academic Writing Reference Handbook.

IQISIL15-16: Ahmmm, because I had the resource, but I didn't really know how to use it. Although, it has like the table of content and all of that but I did not know how to use it.

IQ2SIL28-30: I mean, you can improve in our writing skills, ahmm, but, ahmm, with guidelines, but ahmm, I do not know, ahmm, maybe with more instructions about ahmm, about the handbook.

Figure 4 illustrates that the 56,3% of the participants reported using the handbook “often” and “very often”; this shows that going to the book repeatedly is not directly connected neither to the level of interaction, nor to the proper use of the content. Likewise, in *Figure 2* (presented the in the section 5.1.1), we evidenced that even though the students claimed to have a moderate or thorough interaction with the book, their written products were not as good as expected. This suggests that the understanding process was not successful, and it is manifested in *IQ1SIL15-16* and *IQ2SIL28-30* where the students expressed that although the AWRH is well-organized and the table of content is self-explanatory, they still need an extra guidance for connecting the information contained in the handbook and their current compositional necessities. Having context-related material does not ensure students make meaningful connections unless the professor mediates this learning process. Thus, the mediation process entails helping students make comparisons between what they have done, their already acquired knowledge and the present task. In this way, the handbooks’ information would be more pertinent for them, and they would be able to identify some of their strengths and areas of difficulty in writing.

Mediation must be understood as “the process of facilitating access to knowledge and concepts for others, particularly if they may be unable to access this directly on their own” (CEFR, 2018, p.106). This then supports the learners’ need of a mediator who guides them throughout the process of construction of understanding and provides them with mechanisms for the implementation and expansion of this writing knowledge. Contrary to the assumption that advanced language learners are capable of successfully approaching pedagogical material on their own, Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013) asserted that information from textbooks do not

go straightforward to the learners' brain. There is a clear congruence between what the project's participants have expressed, and what is actually necessary in any educational environment where students are required to use pedagogical material to foster their learning processes. To summarize, it cannot be assumed that the organization and content accuracy of material such as the AWRH as well as the students' language level are the only variables that influence the results of its usage.

4.3 The Academic Writing Reference Handbook's Availability and Contextualized Examples represents an Effective Resource for Higher Education Students

In spite of the fact that the AWRH did not contribute to the participants' writing skills development as significantly as expected, its usefulness for college writing assignments cannot be denied. We noticed that the handbook was efficient at helping students address higher education writing requirements since it was permanently at learners' disposal, and it provided clear examples, being essential for the participants to start writing. First of all, considering that many of the writing tasks are written outside the classroom, the students' access to the professor' support is potentially reduced. For this reason, students value the possibility of having a reliable source they can go to whenever needed. Secondly, students said that being provided with writing samples was vital for writing, so they could have a model to follow that allowed them to know some of the parameters the professor expected them to include. These insights are shown in the following data:

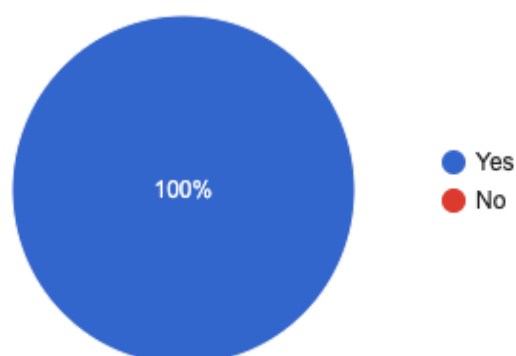


Figure 5. Students' opinion in regard to the Academic Writing Reference Handbook fulfillment of higher education writing necessities.

IQ7S14L55-56:You can go to it everytime and like review it. It is very good I think.

IQ7S2L66-70: Yes, it's because, mmm, as I said, normally what we do when we have a written assignment is to search for information in the internet or search for some kind of guidelines. When we have that kind[sic] of tools that are very connected to our context, to our reality, what exactly the professors are asking for. I think it is extremely useful because you can, yeah, extract the ideas from there and start writing from from the ideas, the tips.

IQ7S6L70-74: Yes, one thing that, ahhh, the text can help us improve it's because there are some examples and we see the examples and we see what the teacher may expect from us; that is very helpful. Because when we don't have like a model of what we need to do, it is kind of different, and sometimes we try like...guessing what the teacher expect from us.

As shown in *Figure 5*, the students agreed that the AWRH provides university students with essential tools to address the writing demands. *IQ7S14L55-56* shows that the handbook is effective due to its permanent availability for students to solve their doubts that may arise while composing their texts. From *IQ7S2L66-70* and *IQ7S6L70-74*, we observed that for the interviewed learners being exposed to examples before starting to write helps them better address the tasks' requirements. Although it is imperative to have a set of guidelines when a writing piece is assigned, we could evidence in students' comments that those instructions are not always clear. Samples are helpful at clarifying the criteria, language and structures they have to stick to. In fact, the AWRH has the potential to support students

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through its examples and recommendations regarding all the components of writing academically.

One of the main challenges faced during the design of this research project was the uncertainty on determining if a tool such as the AWRH could support students to improve their writing knowledge and skills. Authors like Yang (2016) considered that the deficient academic writing skills among college students arise from bad writing instruction and lack of pedagogical materials; these were some of the reasons for creating the handbook. Results showed that implementing the AWRH as a support for students' written assignments and including examples corresponding to the most requested genres were effective pedagogical strategies. This last factor is supported by Hyon (1996) who suggested that in order to undertake the academic writing demands of current educational issues, it is recommended to work on writing from the explicit exposure to the particularities each genre has; thus, modeling is crucial for accompanying students in the process of learning to write academically.

4.4 Writing Areas that were Positively Impacted by the Students' Use of the Academic Writing Reference Handbook

After having analyzed the results related to the impact and effectiveness of the handbook, we decided to explore the specific compositional changes evidenced in the participants' written samples. The AWRH positively influenced the students' reflective writing products as they prioritized this genre when using the handbook; it was due to the complexity this genre represented for them in sixth as well as in eighth semester. Furthermore, there was an improvement in their most predominant errors regarding wordiness and L1-interference, which were present in the descriptive and reflective genres.

A close look at the comparison between the students' pre and post samples revealed that there was an overall reduction on the errors committed. Different from the participants'

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writing experience in 6th semester, in 8th semester, they not only had access to the regular professor's assistance but also to the AWRH which was determinant for their improved performance. The majority of students took advantage of the Genre-based Approach chapter, which explains the structure and vocabulary of descriptive, expository, reflective and argumentative essays segmentally, by focusing their attention on reflections. This corroborates the important role the handbook played in students' writing improvement as this was the genre with less errors. Since participants also gave priority to the construction and elaboration of ideas, their syntax errors, specifically related to wordiness and L1-interference, significantly diminished. The following charts and graphs show evidence of the aforementioned aspects:

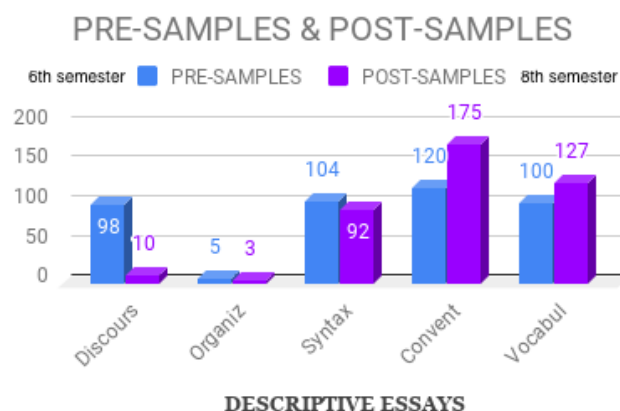
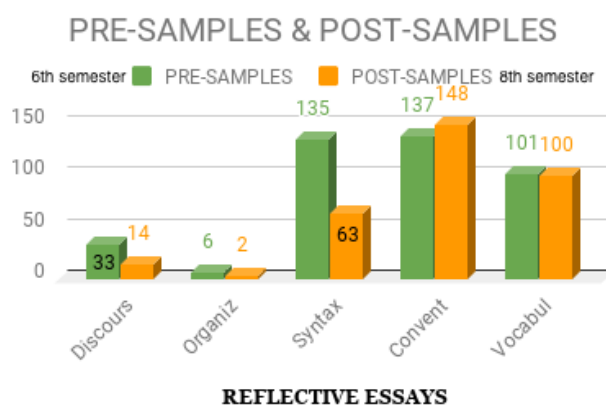


Figure 6. Students' errors in descriptions in sixth and eighth semester.



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Figure 7. Students' errors in reflective essays in sixth and eighth semester.

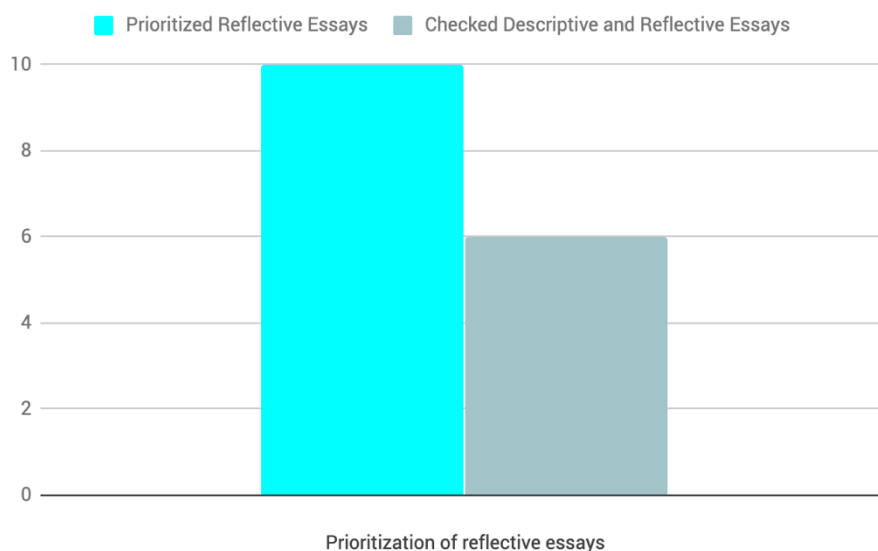


Figure 8. Students' prioritization of reflective essays

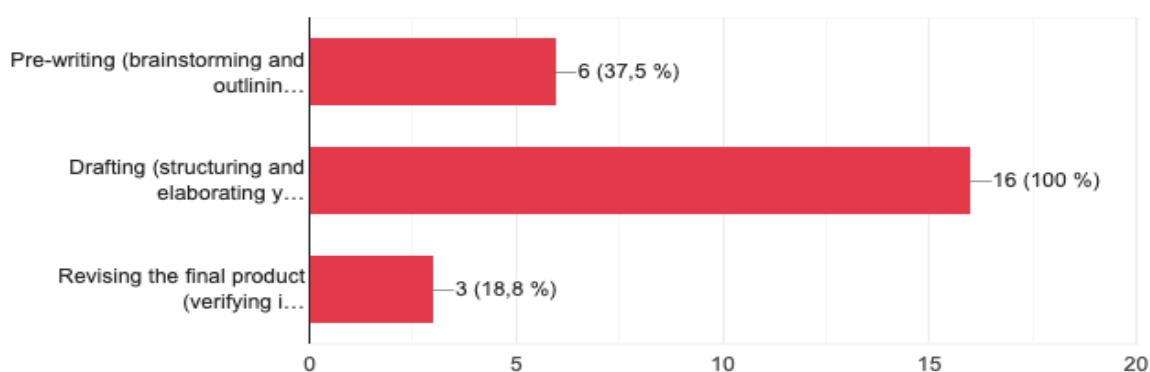


Figure 9. Stages of emphasis when using the handbook.

In connection to *Figure 6* and *Figure 7*, the descriptive and reflective essays had a noticeable improvement in three main features: (1) in the description, discourse went down from 98 errors to 10, and in the reflection, the same category was reduced from 33 to 14 errors; (2) in the description, organization errors were diminished from 5 to 3, and in the reflection, these errors were lowered from 6 to 2; (3) in the description, errors in syntax decreased from 104 to 92, and in the reflection, the reduction was from 135 to 63. Although

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there was not a total improvement in the five evaluated categories, we can say that most of the 32 post-samples increased their quality in relation to the pre-samples. This was possible due to the additional support provided by the handbook. The remarkable interest students had on the reflective genre is shown in *Figure 8* where 10 out of 16 participants focused on this type of text. Indeed, once again *Figure 7* illustrates the notable difficulties the participants had in conventions, syntax, and vocabulary when writing reflections before, and this might be the reason why they prioritized this genre over the others.

From the results presented in *Figures 6, 7, and 8*, it is undeniable that most of positive compositional improvements were evidenced in the reflective essays, but wordiness and L1 interference improved in descriptions as well. These two types of errors belong to the syntax category which entails the coherence of the sentences' structure. Having this in mind, *Figure 9* shows that students mostly used the handbook for drafting their texts which encompasses structuring and elaborating ideas. The participants' emphasis on these processes is the reason why they could diminish wordiness and L1 interference errors. We can infer that these types of errors come from the negative interference that Spanish exerts over the students' productions in the second language, suggesting that they are not only improving their compositions, but also overcoming the tendency to allow L1 interference.

At this point, we consider pertinent to reiterate that “many scholars and teachers recognize that writing in any language is a complex task which consists of taking into account components such as purpose, audience, textual features, style, context of writing, content knowledge, and linguistic knowledge” (Araújo, 2009, p.54); writing is even more difficult when the task also involves high cognitive thinking skills such as reflecting. This justifies the students' tendency to prioritize the reflective genre over the descriptive, which at the same time, supports the importance of adopting the genre-based approach for writing instruction. On the other hand, the participants had a tendency to use the AWRH for the

structuring of sentences because it provided them with the explicit guidance they needed to master syntax. In fact, “the majority of complex syntax does not develop until late in the process of learning” (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p.249). Therefore, it is understandable that even though the participants are advanced second language learners, they still struggle with this writing feature.

4.5 Transferability of Writing Knowledge Thanks to the Students' Use of the Academic Writing Reference Handbook

Apart from the positive compositional changes evidenced in the students' writing samples, the AWRH also helped eighth semester students transfer writing knowledge from the Academic Writing Course offered in sixth semester to the Classroom Language Assessment course. The Genre Approach and the Writing Process were the two features that students transferred the most. The Academic Writing course was the first moment where the participants got acquainted of strategic, structural, and procedural components of writing academically. These were the aspects the students remembered and reinforced thanks to the handbook's components. The relevance of the handbook within the transfer process is represented in the following data:

IQ5S14L40-45: For example, the process of writing, I remember that we also learned to make opinion essays, argumentative essays, well not argumentative but contrastive, a lot of types of essays and also the structures that you must have for introduction, three paragraphs and then the conclusion. And also the ... the structure for each paragraph like topic sentence, then you give some arguments or some reasons, and then you just close with a small closure for the paragraph. It was in the academic writing course and I saw it in the handbook.

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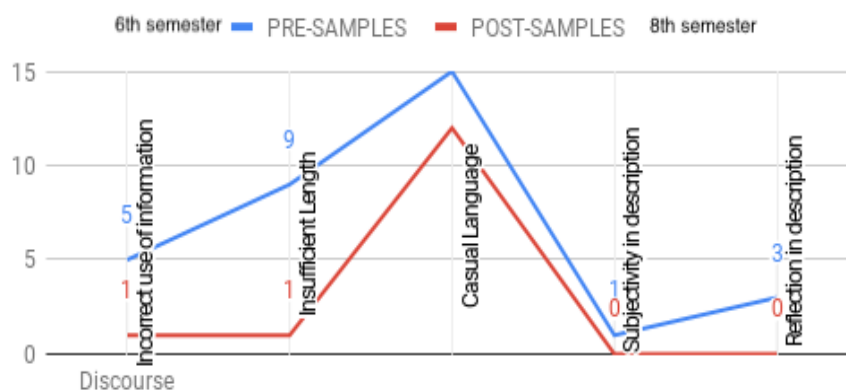


Figure 10. Discourse error analysis in reflective essays.

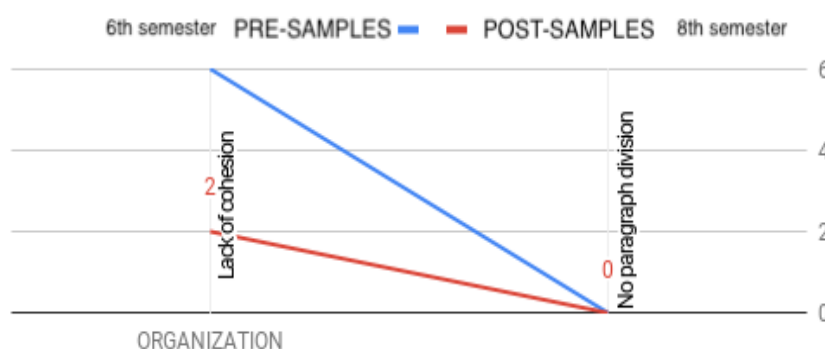


Figure 11. Organization error analysis in reflective essays.

The transferability is corroborated in IQ5S14L40-45 fragment where the student associated the themes of the handbook with the content of the Academic Writing Course. The student indicates that she could recall knowledge about the Writing Process Approach since it was included in the handbook which reinforces the idea that students' memory and notes may not be enough to ensure knowledge transfer. Transferability of genre awareness components is also noticeable since she regarded elements of the structure of paragraphs and essays as being key components of the course and the handbook.

Nevertheless, a successful transferability process is not only evidenced by students' responses, but also reflected in the number of errors students made; *Figure 10* and *Figure 11* show students' number of errors in the pre and post samples in two categories: discourse and organization. For instance, in *Figure 10*, the label "Incorrect use of information" went from

five to one error which means the students were able to interpret and present the information accurately according to the genre. In the same graph, the items “Subjectivity in description” and “Reflection in description” showed that the students improved their ability to discern when to include opinions and/or facts appropriately in a text. Connected to organization, in *Figure 11*, the participants were able to keep a logical sequence of ideas throughout their written compositions which was demonstrated in the reduction of errors related to lack of cohesion. The fact that students substantially improved their performance in these two categories strengthens the belief that genre awareness was transferred since students increase the quality of their performance in tasks that they can relate to previous learning experiences.

Transferability is a phenomenon that has been widely analyzed in the language learning field. However, more investigations on transfer continue being carried as it is necessary to do further research on the variables that underlay this process. One example of the complexity of this term is that it can be connected to conceptual, procedural, strategic, or tacit knowledge, and it can have positive or negative connotations (Doyle, 2004). We can identify that there was positive transfer as results show the transferability of the aforementioned types of knowledge which are necessary for good academic writing. The analyzed written samples showed a clear improvement which is connected to what Gass and Selinker (2008) said, “the main claim with regard to transfer is that the learning of task A will affect the subsequent learning of task B” (p. 93). This means that what students learnt during the development of the Academic Writing Course positively impacted their written productions in the Classroom Language Assessment Course thanks to the similarities between the assigned tasks and the content provided in the handbook. Last but not least, it is necessary to continue investigating into this field since “transfer is coextensive with the investigation of learning” (Postman, 1971, p. 1019).

5. Conclusions

This case study aimed at designing an Academic Writing Reference Handbook (AWRH) to ensure the continuous support students need to improve the writing process steps and other particular features that are also related to the different genres required in their courses. In addition, we evaluated the handbook's impact over students' compositions and transferability of writing knowledge through the analysis of their writing tasks as well as through interviews and questionnaires. The results yielded five findings that clearly evidenced the positive impact the handbook's use had on students' writing skills, and the favorable transferability of the participants' writing knowledge from the Academic Writing Course to the Classroom Language Assessment Course written assignments.

Several insights related to the first research question were identified: How does the use of an Academic Writing Reference Handbook influence the way students compose academic texts? The students' texts showed an increase in their quality regarding discourse, organization, and syntax, proving that the use of the handbook positively influences the way learners write. However, this contribution was affected by the lack of the students' awareness in connection to what academic writing requires as well as the plateau of their linguistic development. Focusing on the learners' writing awareness, they considered writing was only a matter of knowing the appropriate structure essays should have. Thus, they ignored crucial components of writing such as grammar, lexicon, punctuation, among others, which reduced both their attention to the handbook's content and the AWRH's possibilities to influence their compositions' quality. In regard to the second drawback, the participants reached a state where the level of confidence with their second language abilities made them overlook the need to edit their written work. For this reason, they did not feel compelled to thoroughly approach the handbook's content aiming to rectify their writing issues, which became another obstacle for improving the way the students composed academic texts. Therefore, in order to

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measure the extent to which pedagogical materials address a specific second language classroom problem, it is necessary to take into account learners' background knowledge of the topic at hand, and their level of language development.

The variability in the impact of the AWRH was not only affected by the learners' characteristics, but also by the professors' mediation of the material. In spite of the fact that we tried to provide the students with supporting material that was friendly and self-explanatory, we found that it was still essential to have an external source of facilitation of the material. Data revealed that it is difficult for the students to link their prior knowledge to the new one in order to strengthen their basis for developing familiar writing tasks. Consequently, the professor's limited incorporation of the handbook in the classes made the students learn less information than expected, which resulted in the loss of impact the AWRH could have had. Stated briefly, it cannot be assumed that the suitability of pedagogical material will ensure students' correct use, not even if they are advanced second language learners; there must always be a mediation process by the professor.

Departing from the fact that support is essential for any writing learning process, providing students with a tool they could access at any moment, and as many times as needed, was key for the success of the AWRH implementation. Since the professor of the course only provided general feedback, the participants expressed that having reliable sources they could use to answer their specific questions made the AWHR a tool that helped them fulfill their writing tasks' requirements. We also discovered that it was essential for the students to see a model writing sample before starting to write their own productions as this gives them a clear notion of what professors may expect from them. Even though guidelines for the development of the task are always given, they may not be clear. Due to this fact, the participants considered the AWRH as a useful reference for consolidating their ideas when

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developing a written assignment. Hence, availability combined with accurate examples may be some of the most important elements to include in pedagogical materials.

The finding directed to answer the first research question presented the compositional changes evidenced in the students' writing samples after using the AWRH. From the analysis of the students' pre-samples, it was interesting to see that the participants made a considerable number of errors in the reflective essays, which implied this genre represented a challenge for them. Consequently, the project's population focused their attention on the reflective section which provided them with advice on the structure that must be followed and the information that must be included in this type of text. Thanks to this prioritization, post-samples evidenced outstanding results in regard to discourse, organization, and syntax. Related to syntax, due to the fact that the students used more the AWRH for the stage of elaboration of ideas, errors in wordiness and L1-interference were remarkably reduced. In brief, these indicators of writing improvement in the areas prioritized corroborate the positive effect the AWRH had on the participants' writing performance. Bearing this in mind, it is recommended to continue developing and implementing pedagogical material such as the AWRH for boosting ELT learners' writing competences.

The last finding shed light onto a possible answer for the second research question: How does the implementation of an Academic Writing Reference Handbook impact the transferability of academic writing skills in an undergraduate course of an English Teacher Preparation Program? In order to measure transferability, we looked for courses where there were similar writing tasks in which the students were able to apply the writing knowledge acquired in the Academic Writing Course. The triangulation of data disclosed that the students satisfactorily transferred schematic, organizational and discursive elements which are related to genre awareness; besides, participants recalled the Writing Process Approach that entails planning, drafting, reflecting, receiving feedback, editing, which are steps

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applicable for writing any type of text. As a final thought, these results not only demonstrated that transferability of writing knowledge is feasible, but also that it benefits the language learning process.

As important as it is to describe the ways in which this research project was successful, it is also necessary to describe some of factors that may have unexpectedly impacted the project's results. Firstly, the characteristics of the sample population play a vital role in the way an investigation is carried out in terms of data collection and analysis. In this case, our target population had a tendency of not following instructions, which in turn, altered the way how they approached the AWRH and the structure of the requested written products. For instance, we asked the students to include an introduction and a conclusion in their essays, but not all of them did so. Therefore, this variable also forced us to change one of the data collection methods for one that could adjust better to the students' essays without modifying the research objectives. Choosing a research methodology that is aligned with the nature of the study does not mean it is the most practical. We developed the data analysis taking into account the Grounded Theory, unaware that this methodology required longer time frames than what was initially planned; this resulted in a hasty data examination process as well as in the increase of the investigators' stress levels.

To conclude, based on the empirical experience obtained in this study, final recommendations can be made if studies of similar nature are to be implemented. Owing to the fact that transferability is a multi-dimensional concept, investigations that include this term as a core concept should consider the following aspects: (1) for the diverse interpretations transferability has, it is suggested to first do a thorough exploration of literature in order to choose the most suitable definition for the study design and delimit some boundaries; (2) as several conditions such as similarity of tasks and content need to be met in order for transferability to be studied, researchers must be mindful whether or not their

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contexts possess the minimum requirements to properly carry out such study; (3) the abstract character of the term transferability hinders the selection of data collection methods, therefore, the research design has to be carefully described in regard to how it intends to measure this concept so that possible deviations and bias are avoided.

6. Research and Pedagogical Implications

This study also shed light onto some implications for creating and implementing pedagogical materials in English Teacher Preparation Programs. Thanks to the active role we had in each of the stages of the project, we could spot some salient areas that should be considered for future similar inquiries. Our participation in the data collection and analysis also provided us with insights into the following implications: (1) there are unpredicted cognitive processes involved in writing in a second language such as the plateau and lack of awareness of the students; (2) there are some pedagogical conditions that have to be met in order to maximize the effectiveness of supporting sources for writing instruction such as professors' mediation.

During the creation of the AWRH, the Writing Process Approach, Genre-based Approach, Error Analysis, and Formative Assessment were included as its core components since they proved to be essential for having a successful writing course (Marulanda & Martínez, 2017). However, in the implementation of the handbook, one research implication came out when it was found that taking these components into account was not enough if students' metacognitive processes are not boosted as well; indeed, despite having a complete guide to better their writing skills and tasks with familiar structures, they still continued having serious writing issues. This means that although it is expected that tasks' similarities and supplementary texts help students decide which compositional aspects from their prior knowledge can be replicated, they are not able to make this connection. Therefore, fostering metacognition among students is an important factor for helping them recognize when and how to use in written assignments their acquired writing knowledge and the new content presented in the pedagogical material.

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Once the data collection and analysis procedures culminated, we noticed implications that must be taken into consideration if the quality of academic written texts is to be improved in ELT contexts. To begin with, this study has shown that one of the major issues in the development of writing skills is the late emphasis done on this ability due to the complexity it represents for second language learners. Unfortunately, it is not until students have reached higher semesters that they are required to learn how to write academically and deliver good written productions simultaneously. However, it is precisely the intricacy of this skill the reason why it should be worked from the beginning of the program along with the other language skills, listening, reading, and speaking. By doing this, students will not only develop writing and their second language simultaneously, but they will also be prepared for when they are asked to write high quality texts.

The early emphasis on writing should also be accompanied with the use of the AWRH, so students are familiarized with this kind of pedagogical material while having continuous support when writing. On top of that, this cross-curricular implementation of the AWRH from early stages to superior semesters in the program will, in turn, solve the inconsistency of writing instruction and evaluation parameters. We found that there is certain level of uncertainty when learners are assigned a written task since, regardless whether the task has been previously done or not, the expected performance may vary depending on the professor. In this sense, if the use of the AWRH is established as professors' reference for teaching and assessing writing, there will be the unity and cohesion students need in order to develop their written assignments accurately.

Finally, it is important to highlight that including the AWRH from basic courses will not guarantee good results if there are not professors' mediation processes between the students and the material. As described in one of the findings, having organized and pertinent content in a textbook does not mean students will know how to apply that information in their

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tasks unless they have explicit guidance in the way it should be done. Thus, in order to assist students in the process of identifying the relationships between the tasks and the handbook's content, professors can ask questions to activate prior knowledge as well as break down the assignments' main parts in small sections that can be easily processed.

7. Limitations

When carrying out a research project, it is important to keep in mind that any type of challenge may emerge during the design, implementation, and findings' report. In this case, we faced limitations in terms of time, unexpected methodological changes, and participants' attitude.

To begin with, time limitations due to external agents were the ones with more implications during the development of the project. To exemplify, this investigation was first conceived to be implemented during the second semester of 2018. However, owing to the higher education problems that the Colombian government and university students were dealing with, there was a national strike which delayed the completion of the project. This event also affected the publishing process of the AWRH, extending the study one semester more. One of the reasons why the researchers planned to carry out this research in the already mentioned time frame was because we wanted to ensure a continuous learning process for the students. Nonetheless, due to the period where the participants did not have contact with the university, this learning process was interrupted, and the findings could have been somehow affected.

These disturbances modified some methodological aspects of the investigation as well. For instance, in view of the fact that the AWRH took six months longer to be published, researchers were forced to change the setting as the students had already finished the course where this material was going to be implemented. Therefore, there was a shift from the Research Foundations Course offered in seventh semester to the Classroom Language Assessment Course given in eighth semester. Notwithstanding, similarities between the writing assignments in both courses permitted researchers to make the respective change without major problems. Another unforeseen circumstance was that some of the initially chosen participants, as a result of the strike, could not take the new course where the

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handbook was going to be implemented. On top of that, the time lost during the strike and the new selection of participants rushed the data analysis process and increased the pressure for the researchers to meet deadlines.

The last constraint encountered throughout the project's implementation was the initial students' perception of the handbook as extra workload. At the beginning, using the AWRH while the participants were composing their texts was perceived as an unnecessary and time-consuming task. Nevertheless, after they received the proper indications to use the pedagogical material, they were more eager to take advantage of it. Other aspects that delayed some of the investigation procedures was the discontinuous communication with the participants since they sometimes did not follow the pre-established protocols for communication such as confirming the reception of emails and answering back to them.

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9. Appendixes

Here you will find a link where you can access to a folder that contains the list of questions made to the participants during the semi-structure interviews, the questionnaire they had to complete, and the list of errors used to analyze the quality of the participants' written samples in terms of discourse, organization, syntax, conventions, and vocabulary. Also, you will find the format of the consent form participants signed to confirm that they were voluntarily participating in the project and that they authorized researchers to use the data collected from them in the investigation.

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1tDF9Gre9vVbHkKFgpg1NPZ3f61HYJypY>